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THE HOLY VOICE.



THE HOLY VOICE.

A

DISCOURSE,

DELIVERED BEFORE

THE SOCIETY OF THE REV. DAVID DAMON,

IN WEST CAMBRIDGE, MASS.

ON FRIDAY, MAY 14, 1841,

THE DAY OF THE NATIONAL F. T.,

APPOINTED IN CONSEQUENCE OF THE DEATH OF

WILLIAM HENRY HARRISON,

PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES.

BY NORWOOD DAMON.

BOSTON:

CHARLES C. LITTLE AND JAMES BROWN.

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This Discourse is published at the request of a Friend of the Author.

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DISCOURSE.

EXODUS XXXII. 13.

IT IS NOT THE VOICE OF THEM THAT SHOUT FOR MASTERY, NEITHER
IS IT THE VOICE OF THEM THAT CRY FOR BEING OVERCOME.

FROM the period when the morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy, innumerable voices have greeted the ears of men.

The lovely voices of our children, that remind us of other and better days, ere the wicked began to trouble, ere we had eaten any forbidden fruit, ere the foul dregs of this world had tarnished our pristine purity ; when we were of such as is the kingdom of heaven. Those merry, silvery voices, thrill a rich, a sweet, a deep, a heavenly chord within. The honored voices of our parents, that remind us of our confiding affection when we knew not our right hands from our left, of the days when their natural force was not a whit abated or a single hair turned gray, when they were the vicegerents of God to us, the almoners of every good and perfect gift. The kind voices of our friends, that teach us that we are not on a desolate

island, outcasts from sympathy, that teach us how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity. The piteous voices of distress. The voices of merry songsters, of the roaming winds, of battle, of mighty thunders, the voice of many waters, and ten thousand voices that are interesting to the sons of men.

But I would speak rather of those inward voices, that crowd into the soul, that they may deliver their utterance, until they swell it almost to bursting, until it becomes restless as the tempestuous ocean. Such voices oftentimes speak to the soul of future good and urge it to action, urge it onward to the prize. Sometimes they speak with arguments strong and clear to the better judgment, the sober ultimate thought, point out specifically the palpable good. Sometimes they speak in vague visions, beautiful, enchanting, glorious, but indescribable thoughts. By some strange sympathy the soul is fired enamored with them — and rushes wildly on for progress. Is sanguine in the belief of inestimable future good, though it cannot exactly tell when, where, how or what. The oracle does not lift the curtain that conceals the future, but points with glowing and enrapturing eloquence to the few scattered rays that have lingered behind the clear empyrean to illumine and fringe the borders of the veil.

Sometimes these voices speak of evil, and the soul is filled with dark, boding, nervous, apprehensions. Coming events cast none but gloomy

shadows before. Hence soothsayers, augurers, seers. Hence dark-visaged astrologers, that have kept lone vigils in the silent night, watching the solitary planet of some great worm of the dust, as it arose in the darkened east, ascended to its zenith, and slowly scintillated down the western declivity until it was lost beneath the horizon,—and then delivered the augury that should prove the vision of a true prophet, or the chimera of a disordered imagination. Hence it is that—as poets will have it—the moon has often turned to blood, night become hideous, graves yawned and yielded up their dead, fiery warriors fought upon the clouds in ranks and squadrons and right form of war, the noise of battle hurtled in the air, horses neighed, and dying men have groaned. Men have ever felt intuitive premonitions of coming evil and good. These silent, indistinct and mosttime confused voices, are the great mainsprings of our lives. They goad us on, they fill our souls with longings, expectations, apprehensions of the future, until they rush out to shun the real or imaginary Scylla on the one hand, though they should fall into Charybdis on the other. And if haply we may escape them both to bask upon Italia's bright and beauteous shore. These voices excited the mighty interest of the late election. Some spoke to the young, and their souls were kindled with enthusiastic fire, filled with indefinable longings, ardors and hopes. Some addressed

the ambitious, and indistinct visions of place, power, victory, fame, gratified vanity and pride flitted athwart their imaginations. Some addressed the true patriot, and his heart burned and his bowels yearned for the salvation of his country. But one voice spoke to *all*. It has spoken from time immemorial, and it always strikes with a peculiar melody upon our listening ears. Soul, soul, says the enchanting voice, lay up for thyself much goods for many years, and by-and-by when thou hast enough, thou shalt take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. This is the charmer that dictates to us too exclusively in matters of religion, politics, patriotism, and every thing else. Other voices lifted themselves up in our great election, but this was the voice crying in the wilderness, make ye the road to victory straight. The hungry cry for much goods, this was the effective engine. On this golden pivot turns the Presidency; this is the hinge. He who will give us the most and best money shall wear the crown. Yet think not that I would altogether condemn this voice; when rightly heard it speaketh righteousness. He that provideth not for his own household has denied the faith, is worse than an infidel. For some time past many of our countrymen have found it difficult to do even that. Our times and affairs have been sadly out of joint. We could not, according to our custom, buy, sell, get gain. Business, speculations, were dead. What more

dreadful calamity could befall this dear money-loving people. Parties looked suspiciously upon each other for the causes of these evils. Heaven only knows through what indirect and crooked paths they tried to hunt each other down. For twelve long troublous years the present dominant politics rested against the beam. But of late the balance turned—and bells were rung, processions marched, banners waved, orators declaimed, cannons roared, the people shouted, Harrison was our chief. This was the voice of them that shouted for the mastery.

Well might it make the old hero's heart swell to see his country's banner flaunting in every breeze, in every village, on a thousand hills. To see processions numerous as the sands on the sea shore or the stars in the heavens for multitude, marching over hills and winding through valleys, to meet the great congregation, that had come forth in gala-day attire. Well might he be proud when he heard them tell of his battle-grounds, his deeds of daring and of philanthropy in days of yore—when he heard their shoutings from the rising to the setting of the sun—and all this to honor him! It must have seemed to him like some dream of eastern romance that he was thus suddenly and highly exalted. Almost must he have feared to open his mouth, to utter speech, lest the people should shout—‘it is the voice of a god and not of a man,’—and the fate of a Herod be his. Never was such excitement, such en-

thusiasm, such high expectations in this land before !

Yet just as he had reached his high estate, he shook hands with his people, received their blessing and died. Yes, while the roar of cannon still echoed through his princely dwelling, while the shouts of the people still rent the air, while missives of congratulation were hourly arriving ; he lay silent and apart from his friends and people. He knew no more of the deeds that were doing under the sun, than the statues in the capitol. There was no more help in him. In the hour of triumph he left them and their works forever. Strange, sad, disappointment ! Mysterious providence of God !

Yet greater men than he have died. King David was the pride, the hope, the joy of all Judea. He had so long and so gloriously reigned that Hebrew eyes could hardly look upon another man as king. Jerusalem had grown up with him, and the sons of Israel would as soon have thought to arise in the morning and look in vain for their beloved city, or the place where it had been swallowed up, as to look up to the throne and not to see king David there.* Was it possible that he who had never quailed before any difficulties, should meet a king of terrors that was too powerful for him ? Was it

* The Absalom rebellion is no argument against this. At that time the people were under a temporary hallucination.

possible that a man of such grasp of mind, such fixedness of purpose, such integrity of soul, with such a rare combination of gifts and acquirements, that fitted him to rule over Israel so much better than any other man,—was it possible that he should be taken from them? Was it not too great a sacrifice for earth to make? Could Israel survive the shock? As well might the Ark of God, that had cheered them through all their wanderings decay, as their King David grow old and die. And yet when he found that his strength was abated, that his natural heat was gone; he one day called his beloved Solomon to his bedside and said — “I go the way of all the earth.” What words could have thrilled his son with a more sudden or fearful shock! The dreadful certainty that after all, even king David the confidant of God, the man whose heart was perfect with him, must die, was forced in an instant upon his mind. The father, the king, the greatest, the best die? overwhelming thought! He never could realize it before! Are we *all* then worms of the dust? I would not then live always. I would not, like a poor insect, outlive my summer companions, and suffer alone in the dismal winter. I would gladly welcome my appointed time. For I know that if the greatest and best are called to leave their exalted trusts, there must be more glorious honors in the life to come. The voice of God is better than the voice of those that shout for victory.

Few of us to whom the inward voices are continually speaking, listen as David did to the voice of true wisdom. We were thinking of better times, hearing of reviving business, rapid gains, the princely fortunes that should be ours. And when God spoke and our chieftain died, we hardly knew his voice. We had forgotten that our plans were not the most important in the universe. We had forgotten, that high as the heavens are above the earth, so are God's ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts. We had forgotten, that there is a truer wealth than earthly riches, a truer glory than to wear a kingly crown.

David had a son who forgot all this ; did not, like Solomon, give ear to his father's instructions, but kept aloof, despised instruction, and listened to a lying voice. Ill-starred was the day when he first arrayed his unblemished person, and sat himself in the gateway of Jerusalem, that great thoroughfare of his father's empire, to steal the hearts, the honor, the patriotism of his people. Sweetly, kindly, did he smile upon and kiss them, as some have done since his day ; with well-feigned fervor, angel-like enthusiasm, he lifted up his voice and exclaimed, " O that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice ! " It was his chief desire to be king ; that was what he called glory. He was made king, yet he did not sleep in the

sepulchre of the kings. Neither heaven or earth would be disgraced by the apostate's presence, or soothe his expiring agony. Nebuchadnezzar listened to this same lying voice, and after he had built great Babylon, was driven from men to eat grass. His hair became like eagle's feathers, his nails like birds' claws. Belshazzar, his son, called for the golden vessels that had been stolen from Jerusalem, drank wine from them with his concubines, grew merry, praised the gods of silver, gold and brass, and on the self-same night was slain. Alexander the Great, conqueror of the world, wept to think how small his conquests, how soon his vast armies must be sleeping in the dust. Julius Cæsar, chief builder of the great Roman empire, was assassinated and his empire dismembered. Charles, of Sweden, who made all Europe tremble, died of a random cannon-shot. Napoleon, the distributor of bishoprics and crowns, before whom even the Pope of Rome trembled and shed tears, the maker of battles, who left the bones of his soldiers to whiten in every valley, on every hill of Europe — died a mournful exile, without the sympathies we love, with the curse of despair.

All these listened to the voices of earthly passions, all had riches and honors. But where is their honor now? Where is the honor of *all* the great departed? Of sages, orators, and poets? A few scattered laurels remain, but the wreaths are

broken. Plato, Cicero, Shakspeare, and a few others, are remembered ; but the time must come, when their names and fame shall sleep in the same dead oblivious sea with the eternity that has past. Why then are we surprised that *our* chief is gone ? There is truly something else beside this mortal scene.

O my countrymen, the honors of this world are indeed very trifling. Who would wish to be president of a few ants on a mole-hill ? Who would crave the tiny honors of a race whose feet are fastened to this grovelling earth ! Whose pigmy shouts, the least accident, a breath of air, may forever hush ! Who would be king of insects, and bask out in strutting pride a summer's day ? Who would be governor of Lilliput, fighting out the Bigendian Controversy ? And yet we almost think that Harrison was robbed of honor because he was taken to heaven before his presidential term had expired ! Think you that he would resign the celestial crown, which I trust he wears, for the proudest empire on earth ? He did not live to say — “I stay too long, ye are aweary of me ;” but when his honors were new-born and fresh, he left them like a robe pontifical, all still unsullied by the sea of politics, that turbid flood that casts up mud and mire. He left them for high^{er} honors in the courts above.

It is well for us that the voice of God hath spoken. It may teach us to know what real honors

are, and how to live that we may attain them. We have suffered the foolish wicked voices of this earth to cajole our souls too long. Not half so innocently have we been employed as the little child who is pleased with a rattle and tickled with a straw. We have neglected the best interests of our souls, and have been degrading, contracting, killing them, with earthly trifles. If we are apt at chicanery, cunning, successful as demagogues, if ourselves and our party are but in office, it matters not whom we slander and abuse. These are small things compared with our reward which is — glory ! Glory, did I say ? Vanity, thin air, sounding brass, a tinkling cymbal ! Where is there true glory but in the good deeds, and good acquirements of eternal life ? For this our voices should be attuned like rich harp-strings ; for this, our souls should gush out with rivers of insatiate desire.

Earthly honor ! “Can it set a leg, or an arm, or take away the grief of a wound,” or save a soul from death ? Where is the Behemoth and Leviathan ? The mastodon and mammoth ? Where are they who inhabited the vast cities, erected the monuments, that lie buried in the west ? Where are they who traversed those immense forests, that now stand petrified below the surface of the earth ? Well might the wise king, to whom I have referred, exclaim, “Lord what is man that thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that thou visitest him.”

When king David said to his son, "I go the way of all the earth," he added, "be thou strong therefore and show thyself a man." Can you drink in, can your souls digest, the worlds of wisdom in this little passage? I confess mine cannot. "Be thou strong" — above temptation, above the flatteries of worldly sycophants, strong in faith, in purposes of true manhood, in the service of God. Strong in effort, strong in spirit, within thyself a host. Not merely valiant in fight young Solomon, this is but a quota of strength. "Show thyself a man." — A being for eternity, for immortal honors. Upright in business. A true patriot. Above all party meanness or hate. Not to be allured by any bribe. A real neighbor. A true philanthropist, loving his whole race. A being that will do no known wrong. One pure in heart, communing with God. A faithful servant and son of God. Such is *man*. It is no holy-day amusement to make oneself a man. Many a sleek, round, well-fed, and well-favored biped, has taxed the ingenuity of his tailor to the utmost for the most fashionable array of purple and fine linen — yet could not make himself a man. A man! he is but little lower than the angels that minister around the eternal throne!

When David gave this charge to Solomon he said all that was necessary in the premises; all that could be said to the king elect of Israel. Well was it for him that he harkened unto the voice of

his father. Well will it be for our chief rulers, from this time forth forever, if they hearken to the dying words of Harrison, and abide by the principles of our constitution.

My countrymen the holy voice of God hath spoken. It hath called our chief ruler, ere long it will call us. Let us no more then hear the exulting voices of those that shout for victory, or the angry murmurs of the defeated. Let the din of our party broils be hushed, our petty, worldly interests be still. Let us no longer think ourselves infallible, and abuse each other because we *must* differ in political opinions. Let us remember that we are frail, and know nothing. Let us be humble that we may find favor in the sight of God.

Let us remember what we have forgotten too long, that we are *brothers*. Of the same blood ; Jew and Gentile, Federalist and Republican. Is there any honor, any profit, any wisdom, in bitter party quarrels ? In perpetual hatred of each other, because we cannot vote alike, read with each other's eyes, and worship by each other's creed ? If any one tells you so, it is the voice of a selfish, conceited, fiendish, lying ambition ; it is not the voice of wisdom or of God.

Whigs and Democrats, strange it may sound to your ears, but upon high authority a new commandment give I unto you : That ye love one another. We come to bury Harrison, let us bury

party hatred too. Let us no longer set our hearts exclusively upon riches, honors, victory, power, the gratification of our stubborn wills, and the praise of kindred dust. Let us no longer degrade the invaluable powers that God has given us, by using them solely for the trifling things of time and sense. but let us put them to the right use, use them nobly for God and eternity. Is the earthy better than the heavenly? Let us arise, gird on our strength, and show that we are men. Then shall we be heirs of true riches and honors. Eye hath not seen them, ear hath not heard them, nor the heart of man conceived them yet. This cannot be. But we soon shall see, and hear, and know.

In that day when God's voice shall call our spirits home, clothed in incorruptible, living beauty, we shall sit upon our heavenly throne^s and wear immortal crowns. With joy unspeakable and full of glory, we shall join in the society of priests and prophets, saints and martyrs, angels and the spirits of just men made perfect; no more shall we hear the cry of the victors, or the vanquished, but the morning stars shall again sing together, and all the sons of God shall shout for joy.

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